

The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7816 13 April 2013

2 Steps to Spiritual Health



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THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest
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"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

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Editor M Colleen Burns MA

46A Newmarket Road

Cringeliford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover photo by Dorota Kaszczyszyn

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24 Lodge Lane

Keymer, Hassocks

West Sussex, BN6 8NA

ph: 01273 844940

e: inquirersubs@gmail.com

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Find out more about Unitarians

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The General Assembly, Essex Hall

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London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384

Inquiring Words

Make your own Bible. Select and collect all the words and sentences that in all your readings have been to you like the blast of a trumpet.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Austerity doesn't work!

By Tony McNeile

Lighting the chalice at the beginning of worship is one of the rituals shared by many congregations. In my retirement I visit more than a dozen congregations each year and the chalice lighting ritual is different in each one. Some like to have it lit before people start to come in and others have a rota where a member of the congregation will come to the front to light it. Others are not bothered at all and don't like the idea of being involved in lighting candles. I like to say that this ritual of lighting the chalice links us with congregations all around the world and we can feel linked together with them in our worship.

I wonder sometimes what the 'flaming chalice' actually means to us. I know we say it represents the flame of truth in the cup of wisdom but I wonder if it should mean more than just that. Should we give this symbol of Unitarianism a deeper meaning for ourselves? Should it be more than a logo with a consistent identity that we paste onto our stationery and notice boards?

Surely our flaming chalice should offer a deeper iconic connection to our faith. It should be the symbol that connects us spiritually to one another and to that transcendent holiness to which we give the name God.

In my early church-going life, the cross was the symbol of faith. It was clutched by the dying and held in blessing over the suffering. Could I see a minister holding up a chalice to comfort my closing eyes? I can't imagine it.

We are very concerned as a movement that we are slowly fading away, our numbers are sliding downwards. So quite rightly we are concerned about growth. How are we to bring the unchurched and the ungodly into our sometimes ungodly chapels and churches? Yes it is quite right to mow the lawns and put up new inviting notice boards, make the place look lived-in and have plenty of pamphlets available describing what we do and who we are. But what else?

Critics have said that we are not spiritual enough. Because we have veered away from the Christianity of our Presbyterian forefathers, we have also veered away too from the depth and wonder that comes with being spiritual. As one of my old friends once asked, 'Are we a church or a social club?'

It is our proud boast that we are each on our own spiritual path but do we ever talk to one another about what we believe? Should we pilgrims not be chatting about where we are going and openly discussing our beliefs and our faith? Should our ministers not be engaged in dialogue about the deeper things of the spiritual life and laying out their conclusions at our meetings and in our journals?

I feel the time is coming for a Unitarian Reformation, a turning point that will lead us back to the spiritual gardens of faith. And it could begin with asking what that chalice really holds for us and what it connects us to.

The Rev Tony McNeile is a retired Unitarian minister.

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12 steps can make a difference

'To have a really healthy spirit requires work and commitment, and the sacrifice of other easy pleasures.'

Photo by Maxim Norland



Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health by **David Usher** is a new book being launched at the General Assembly meetings. Here, David gives an idea of how to give your inner life a workout.

Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health is not designed to turn you into a spiritual colossus.

It does not automatically follow that if you do all 12 steps you will inevitably become spiritually healthy, able to withstand any and every challenge which life might throw at you. This is not a recipe book. It is not a case of following a recipe to produce the perfect sponge cake.

Neither does spirituality belong to the world of Newtonian physics, in which things follow set patterns and causes have predictable effects.

Spirituality is more akin to quantum physics in which effects can be apparently spontaneous and unpredictable.

You do not have to follow all 12 steps sequentially. You can start wherever feels most comfortable to you, and then you can expand your exercise of other steps as you gain in confidence and competence. It might be that some steps will be more congenial to you. They will fit more easily and readily with your existing beliefs and lifestyle, and will therefore be more efficient in the effect they will have in enhancing your spiritual health. On the other hand, it might be that doing something challengingly uncongenial will have the more profound effect on you, shaking you out of your complacent and familiar comfort zone. It might be the very challenge which offers you the greater progress to spiritual health.

Even still, the 12 steps outlined in this book – if practised consistently and conscientiously – together are more likely to lead you to spiritual health than if you were to do none of them. The more you do, the more often you do them, and the more commitment you give to them, the more likely you are to grow in your spiritual health. Spiritual health is not unlike physical

health. Exercise and practice will not necessarily make you an athlete, but you will not be an athlete if you do not exercise and practise.

To be a really top athlete, you have to commit yourself wholeheartedly to it. It requires sacrifice of other pleasures.

To have a really healthy spirit also requires work and commitment, and the sacrifice of other easy pleasures. Not having a healthy spirit does not make you a bad person, any more than not having a healthy body makes you a bad person. But being spiritually healthy does not just happen. If you have never trained and you are suddenly required to run a marathon, your body will not be able to cope with the demands made upon it. Likewise, if you have never trained and you are suddenly confronted with a life crisis, your spirit will similarly struggle to cope with the demands being made upon it. Reading a book about running is not the same as doing the running. The only way to prepare for a marathon is to do lots of running.

Similarly, reading a book about becoming spiritually healthy is not the same as doing the work it entails. And the work takes time. In truth, it takes a lifetime. Spiritual health is not something which, once attained, remains a given. Again using the analogy of physical health, becoming fit is only half the battle. One has then to stay fit. You cannot say "I have reached physical fitness. I have run a marathon. Therefore I don't have to do any more training." If you do that, you will soon lose your fitness and your body will revert to flaccidity. So it is with spiritual fitness. Whatever exercises or disciplines you might choose as the ones most congenial to you; you have to keep doing them at regular intervals. Hourly. Daily. Weekly.

Monthly. Seasonally. Annually.

The book does not rely on any prescribed belief system, theological assumptions or church affiliation. You can read and benefit whatever your beliefs or religious commitments. You can be Christian or Buddhist, Muslim or Jewish; or you can be among the great majority of people in the modern Western world who have no formal religious identification yet who harbour a deep hunger for spiritual fulfilment.

As with a recipe book or a book about diets, it is designed

(Continued on next page)

Spiritual health gives purpose

(Continued from previous page)

not just to be read and then put on the shelf; it is designed as a manual to help you towards your goal. It will be effective only to the extent that you apply yourself to living the 12 steps and making them an every-day part of your life. As such, the real work of health begins not with reading the book but with putting down the book and acting on what you have read.

So you need to ask yourself, 'Do I have the real interest and commitment to do the sustained work of attending to my spirit? Is my spirit important enough to me that I will nurture it even when I am tempted by laziness or distraction? Am I willing to put time and energy into my spiritual life, that I might then feel a greater sense of purpose and fulfilment?'

If you go to that large store which specialises in flat-pack furniture, and you buy a wardrobe to assemble at home, you know that when you open the pack you will have everything you need. The panels, the screws, the tools and the instructions, written in more languages you knew existed and all equally inscrutable, and with diagrams bearing little resemblance to reality. But, if you can decipher the instructions, you know that you have everything you need, and at the end of the process, straightforward or exasperating as it might have been, you will have your wardrobe assembled. And if you don't, if a panel is missing or there is a fault in the merchandise, you can take it back to that store and you can either exchange it for another or get your money back. The process is mechanical and methodical. It follows a Newtonian understanding of physics. Do this, and that will happen. This cause will bring about that effect. Put tab A in slot B, and the wardrobe will be stable.

Spiritual health does not follow a Newtonian model of physics. Spiritual health is in the world of Quantum Physics, in which events can appear random and unconnected. In which this cause might bring about that effect, but then again, it might not. This cause might bring about another effect, or no effect at all, or the desired effect might not have any discernible cause at all. Such is the work of the spirit, which bloweth where it listeth.

Spiritual health cannot be quantified, and there are no guarantees. You will not get your money back if you are no healthier spiritually after reading this book, or even after conscientiously following all 12 steps.

Becoming spiritually healthy does require discipline and practice, dedication and patience, but it is not an exact science, and part of being spiritually healthy is to accept that lack of exactitude. There are some contemporary writers who are disparaging of religion and spirituality and all matters relating to questions of faith, because they seem incapable of understanding that lack of exactitude. They demand empirical proof, they want to see the paper trail, and in the absence of that proof they are dismissive, even contemptuous.

There is a significant story in the Christian gospels about Jesus, shortly after he had begun his public ministry of teaching and healing, being taunted by his detractors. 'Show us a miracle,' they mock, 'and then we will believe.' Jesus resists their jibes, responding that faith which requires such empirical proof on demand has ceased to be faith. Yet, elsewhere, he spontaneously does perform miracles.

Let's leave aside any discussion about whether Jesus did actually perform miracles of nature and healing and, if he did,

what their purpose was and how we today are supposed to interpret them. Let's also not get caught up on any hermeneutical debate about whether that exchange ever actually did take place between Jesus and his detractors. Let's just reflect on the significance of the story as a teaching opportunity. Spiritual health is not necessarily a logical or sequential result of taking certain steps. It is my contention that if you do follow the 12 steps advocated, you are very likely to grow healthily in the life of your spirit. But you will need to do them with an attitude of faithfulness, not as empirical science.

Unlike advertisements for the newest fad in dieting or exercise equipment, I offer no before and after photographs of people who have been transformed from overweight, unhappy slugs into trim, attractive people who now beam with self-confidence. Becoming spiritually healthy is not a way to make you more attractive to the opposite sex, nor will it get you a better job or earn you more income. Being spiritually healthy is not something which is particularly prized by the majority of modern society more fascinated by baubles and bling. Unlike winning lots of money in a mindless quiz show, or attaining instant celebrity based not on talent but a willingness to debase yourself in front of the gawping masses, unlike being slim or looking good in designer clothes, spiritual health is not a value much prized or promoted in popular culture. Yet, we know that spirit raising, as elusive as it is, fills our lives with meaning and purpose. Seeking to live a spiritually centred life is a worthy goal.

The Rev David Usher is District Minister for Unitarians in London and the South East. Details on how to buy the book are at the bottom of the review on page 5.

2020

FOR A HEALTHY THRIVING UNITARIAN
PRESENCE ACROSS GREAT BRITAIN



Invites

EXPRESSIONS of INTEREST

from groups, individuals, congregations, districts and others who wish to establish a new or rekindled Unitarian congregation and community. Up to £100,000 will be available to support such a project, together with significant help and advice during the first 5 years of growth.

An 'Expression of Interest' application form can be completed @ www.2020unitarian.org/apply/eoi/

Interested parties may wish to read the 'How to Apply' section on the 2020 website for further advice and guidance or email: application@2020Unitarian.org.

Deadline for completion: **FRIDAY 28th JUNE, 2013.**

Practical manual with room for reflection

By Catherine Robinson

Despite its title, there is nothing other-worldly about this new book, written by the Rev David Usher and published by the Lindsey Press. Spiritual health, according to the author, 'is about being fully alive, both open to life's possibilities and able to withstand its disappointments'.

The book is a practical manual, designed for use by anyone seeking eternal life – 'life measured by quality and intensity, not quantity' – within the context of everyday demands and distractions. Many of its insights are drawn from David Usher's own life-experience: raised in Australia, he worked as a jackaroo on sheep and cattle stations in the outback before travelling around the world and eventually training as a Unitarian minister in England. He has served congregations in the USA and UK for more than 30 years and is currently the District Minister for Unitarians in London and the South East.

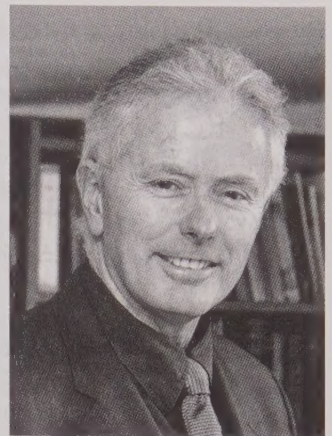
The journey to spiritual health can start at any point, and the 12 steps of this book do not have to be followed in a strict sequence, provided that you are willing to be led out of your familiar comfort zone at some point. The journey can be undertaken alone, or by groups of like-minded people as a shared exercise. Each chapter ends with questions for individual reflection or group discussion. This is one of the best features of the book. The questions, deliberately simple and direct, are designed to jolt the reader out of the complacency into which we all lapse from time to time.

Some of the steps are concerned with purely personal

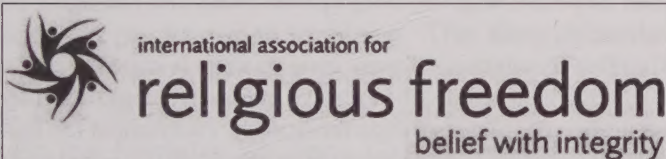
issues (such as 'Come to Terms with Mortality' ... 'Know Your Body and Keep It Healthy' ... 'Observe Daily Rituals'). Others address our relationship with the world around us ('Be In Touch With Nature' ... 'Belong to a Religious Community' ... 'Do Meaningful Work' – which is not necessarily the same thing as paid employment). Although almost every page is graced with touches of down-to-earth humour, I found myself squirming at several points, particularly when I reached the step entitled 'Give Away One Tenth of Your Income'. That means *your gross income, not your net income*. After offering some inspiring examples of people who do just that, David urges: 'Try it. Give away a tenth of your income. Set up a system whereby you allocate that tenth to charitable giving to others before you spend so much as a penny on yourself. Do you have faith that the universe will respond to your generosity by being more generous to you in return?' Well, do I? I'm still working on it – but that is what this book aims to do: to prompt readers to re-examine their own lives and decide for themselves when and how to change direction.

In case this book sounds like a daunting challenge, it is worth noting that the final step is entitled 'Relax, Smile at Yourself'. David concludes with these words: 'When you have done your personal spiritual practice; when you have attended the committee meeting of the religious community to which you have bound yourself; when you have given away a tenth of your income; when you have honoured your body with healthy food and exercise; when you have done the good work of social action; when you have marvelled at the beauty of nature ... when you have done any or all of those things, then relax, lighten up ... be kind to yourself. Forgive yourself when you have failed to be as disciplined in your spiritual practice as you had intended, even as you re-commit anew to that discipline.'

Catherine Robinson is a member of the Chapel Society of Manchester College Oxford and is a member of the Lindsey Press panel.



David Usher



Upcoming events

19-21 April: IARF/WCF April 19-21 – Compassion Retreat at Worthing.

See 'events' www.worldfaiths.org or email Sister Georgina Long of Brahma Kumaris on gannlong@gmail.com

18 May: IARF AGM – 10am-4pm Croydon Unitarian Church (£5)

The Meaning of Being a Survivor with Rev Chris Hudson
Women's Role in Peacemaking with Kiran Bali, MBE,
Charanjit Singh & Rubab Mehdi Rizvi

More info from Feargus O'Connor, ggunirev@aol.com

20-23 August: IARF/WCF Peace Commission Conference at the Unitarian Church, Horsham.

Religious Freedom and Responsibility: Speakers include: Rev Chris Hudson, MBE, Belfast; Dr Marcus Braybrooke, WCF; Bishop Kieran Conry, Arundal; Dorothee Gehrmann, Germany; Dr Shlomo Alon, VP, IARF, Israel; Dr Yehuda Stolov, Israel; Professor Hal French, US/IARF; Sheikh M. Amin-Evans, IARF, UK; Charanjit and Ajit Singh MBE; Dr Doris Hunter, IARF/USA; Annelies Trenning, IARF/Netherlands; Rev Istvan Kovacs, Romania; Advocate Rengapashyam, India; Dr Dan McKanan, Harvard; Derek McAuley, UK.

Registration £300 – discount until 30 April. (£50, if lodging is not required.)

Register: www.worldfaiths.org/tickets.php

Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health
by David Usher is
available from Essex
Hall for £8+92p p&p.

To order, contact
Audrey Longhurst
(tel. 020 7240 2384;
e-mail: alonghurst@unitarian.org.uk).

It is also available via
Amazon. ISBN-10:
0853190836



Twelve Steps
to Spiritual Health

David Usher



LLSG: Strengthening local leadership

By Kate Buchanan, Peter Davies and Margaret Robinson

The role of the Local Leadership Strategy Group (LLSG) is to ensure that every congregation is served by trained leaders. Building on the wealth of materials already available, we offer appropriate training and facilitation to strengthen spiritual communities.

The Big Red Phone Survey conducted last year confirmed the importance of support and training for many of our congregations. A small team of volunteers surveyed over 90 congregations and it was great to hear about the social action projects and social events already taking place. However, many smaller congregations, especially those with ageing members, found it hard to build the 'critical mass' of active volunteers which could lead to growth. Many younger members were too busy to attend extended training courses which highlighted the need for a flexible training scheme offering shorter workshops as well as longer courses.

Education and training

A range of education and training opportunities is provided by a pool of volunteers. This includes well-established courses as well as the new Modular Training Scheme, a framework of seven modules covering all aspects of leadership training:

Modular Training Scheme

This scheme gathers leadership training in one place. Whether you hold an officer role in your congregation, run discussion/children's groups or simply want to learn more about Unitarianism, there's a course for you. The LLSG-certificated foundation-level courses will be offered in response to demand from local groups so please do let us know which modules would be particularly useful to you or other members of your congregation: unitarianLLSG@gmail.com

Worship Studies: This course provides practical skills for leading services and an understanding of Unitarian thought. Its foundation step is part of the Modular Training Scheme.

Training for Local Leadership: Learn about governance, the roles of officers and committees, and the day-to-day running of congregations.

Foundations of Unitarianism: An introduction to the General Assembly, Unitarian theology, and history.

Facilitation and Group Life: Skills for engagement group facilitation and beyond.

Children, Young People and Intergenerational: Introducing participants to key issues and skills involved in working with children, young people and intergenerational groups.

Rites of Passage: A course for lay leaders interested in conducting child namings/baptisms, weddings and funerals.

Pastoral Care: This course is designed to help congregations without professional leadership meet their pastoral needs.

Revolution: We plan to run this in-depth training for youth and children's leaders again in 2014 enabling participants to run high quality religious education courses.

Safeguarding policy and training: All congregations have responsibilities under Safeguarding legislation for the protection of children and vulnerable adults regardless of whether



New logo for the LLSG

there are children or vulnerable adults in the congregation. The LLSG organised three training days certified by CCPAS with around 80 participants in total. The GA's Safe and Sound guidelines can be downloaded here: <http://bit.ly/ZxSMiO>

Hucklow Summer School (HSS): HSS is a week of relaxed fellowship and fun, living in a Unitarian spiritual community of all ages! It aims to offer a balanced programme of activities for both the heart and head. More information: [www.huck-](http://www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk/)

[lowsummerschool.org.uk/](http://www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk/) or call Christine Thompson: 01926 741398. Booking deadline is 15 April.

Facilitation Support: In order to support groups and congregations, a pool of trained facilitators is available to visit congregations. They can run workshops or facilitated meetings on a number of subjects.

Facilitating Vision Meetings: Our facilitators can help set priorities for the future in order to achieve your church's potential. Whether this is to attract new visitors or plan a major social action project, an external facilitator can provide both focus and an alternative perspective.

Congregational Assessment Process (CAP): Using the Congregational Assessment Process, facilitators provide feedback on congregational practice during a weekend visit. Their survey thoroughly covers all aspects of congregational life then they meet with the congregation to discuss and agree on achievable goals.

Conflict Resolution: If your congregation is experiencing a conflict, which is difficult to resolve internally, please consider requesting conflict resolution facilitation. Two trained facilitators will visit the congregation to speak to all the individuals involved and then hold a facilitated meeting to resolve the issues and set a plan for the future.

Engagement Groups Support: An engagement group is run according to a particular intention, set of principles, session structure, and style of facilitation/leadership. We offer support to those leading engagement groups through the website: www.unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk and the Facilitation and Group Life module of our training scheme.

Information and Resources

In response to the phone survey, improvements are being made to the way information about local leadership is shared. The Congregational Support section of the GA's website – now called Training, Support & Resources – has been reorganised to make it easier to find the resources you need. It has been divided into: Education and Training, Facilitation Support, Publicity, Help for Congregational Officers, Useful Resources and Who we are.

Worship Materials

There will be four new worship packs this year to mark the Trinity Act, Margaret Barr's anniversary, and more general materials which can be used at any time.

If you have any comments or suggestions about our work, please contact the LLSG by email on unitarianLLSG@gmail.com or call Margaret Robinson (co-Chair): 01642 782 219

EC February Key Messages

Executive Committee 22 and 23 February 2013 – Key Messages

Ministerial Roll and Ministerial Students

The Executive Committee approved the inclusion of Rev Daniel Costley, Rev Danny Crosby and Rev Bob Pounder on the Roll of Ministers with full status. Rev Lewis Rees was added to the Roll of Ministers with probationary status.

The following were offered training to become a minister; Kate Buchanan and Kate McKenna at Oxford and Phil Waldron at Manchester.

Local Leadership Strategy Group

The work of the Local Leadership Strategy Group was explored with Margaret Robinson, co-chair. Margaret outlined the progress to date following the results of the "Big Red Telephone" survey of congregations. Three safeguarding awareness and volunteering events had taken place. Three Worship Studies courses had been arranged for 2013. Workshops would be held at the Annual Meetings and a Prospectus of courses published. Arrangements for worship packs were in place. The Group were thanked for their contribution and were asked to look at how they might work more closely with the Ministry Strategy Group and how they saw effective local leadership developing in the future.

Annual Meetings 2013 and 2014

An update was presented on the arrangements for the Annual Meetings in Nottingham. The details of the Executive Committee's report as Trustees were finalised along with those of the three Strategy Groups. The Youth Panel would also be asked to report on its activities. Attendance appeared to be good and we looked forward to an exciting gathering.

The Annual Meetings in 2014 will take place 13 – 16 April 2014 at Whittlebury Hall in Northamptonshire. <http://www.whittleburyhall.co.uk/>

2020 Congregational Development Programme

The Executive Committee approved the appointment of Jane Couper to the 2020 Board. A major goal of raising £50,000 has been agreed to enable at least one project to be fully

funded. The aim is to achieve this milestone in time for a call for applications in May 2013. Significant steps have been taken to use a range of communications tools to improve awareness and involvement in 2020.

Financial Development

A monitoring report on quota numbers for the previous year was considered; including the implications of further falls in financial contributions. Fewer quota paying members had a direct impact on the amount to be claimed from matched Bowland Trust funding. It was agreed that, as we were over one-third of the way through the period of the support of the Bowland Trust, a review of the financial development of the General Assembly was required and the Acting Treasurer would progress.

Stipend Review Committee

The report of the Stipend Review Committee was presented and approved with minor amendment for presentation to the Annual Meetings. It was recognised that the proposals for an increase in stipend of 3.5% represented a challenge to the wider Unitarian Movement.

Information Technology Development

The Executive Committee gave the go ahead to an improvement of IT within the General Assembly. Recognising the importance of this technology to the future of our movement, the EC aims to implement the changes within the next 12 months.

After taking specialist external advice, this initiative will see a new IT platform for financial transactions, a database of records and contacts to improve accessibility, a new website incorporating the latest ideas and functionality and improved IT services for staff. The new website, in particular, will seek to provide an easy interface with individuals, congregations and districts, allowing a greater involvement for the Unitarian movement at large.

EC Induction

Arrangements for the transition to a new Executive Committee after the Annual Meetings were considered including a review of the Code of Conduct.

Sometimes faith lies in what we do

I have a friend who is a Methodist lay preacher. One day at church the minister prayed for asylum seekers, especially those being housed in her own town. Once home she began to think that praying was not enough, that if the asylum seekers were in her own community then surely something should be done. She wasn't quite sure what, but she found out where the asylum seekers had been housed and went there. She walked up and down stairs and along corridors with no clear idea in her mind as to what she should do. She knocked on a door that was opened by a diminutive black African woman. 'Are you an asylum seeker?' The woman nodded a 'yes'. 'Do you need any help?' The woman threw herself into my friend's arms and burst into tears. My friend discovered that there were a few fairly straightforward things she could help with immediately. She went back to the church, told her minister and asked for further help from the congregation.

'Oh, I don't think we can do that,' he said. 'It is rather a contentious issue.' So my friend went back on her own and found other people, from other faith groups or none, and now, working together, the help they give is more immediate and focused. For example, asylum seekers are given vouchers but they can't always buy what they need with the vouchers so the group gives cash for vouchers and uses the vouchers themselves. The woman with whom my friend first made contact trained as a nurse and has now bought her own house. She had been receiving death threats in her own country and had had to flee leaving her children behind. Her children are now with her and two of them are at university.

My friend is living out her faith. But she is only doing as much as she is capable of and no more. She has not gone out to Africa to help there – that is more than she could manage. She is not giving a lot of money, she can't afford it.



Are we doing that and are we doing enough of it? Is the Unitarian church/chapel/meeting house the place you would go if you were in trouble? Yes, yes, I know a lot of you are already heavily involved in other things and many of those are charitable but ...

Our Object, as stated on our website, is:

To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.

What is your church doing to serve humanity or respect all creation? We get articles about the big campaigns, such as Oldham's work with asylum seekers. But there must be more than this, lots of small campaigns, small actions. Let us know about what you are doing but ...

But, please, please, please, sit down **all** together and talk about what you are doing. Make sure that any action you take involves everyone.

At Upper Pocklington we have a weekly service. We don't advertise this so that only the truly committed will find us. And we have the Flower Festival. Someone mentioned recycling but we are having nothing to do with that, there is nothing in *Hymns of Worship* about recycling. We are keeping the liberal flame alight; there is nothing more a Unitarian needs to do.

Dorothy Haughton is a worship leader in the midlands.

'Oldies' reunion for IRF and BIRF

By Valerie Walker

Did you attend an International Religious Fellowship (IRF) Conference in the 1950s, 60s, 70s or even 80s? Although the first 'Oldies' Reunion in 1994 (Switzerland) was aimed at former attendees from the 1950s and early 1960s at each subsequent meeting (UK 1998, The Netherlands 2002, Germany 2005, Switzerland 2008 and UK 2011) we have welcomed those who attended in later years and it has been delightful to meet and get to know so many who also share great memories of those fantastic youth conferences.

We (though I don't think it was we Brits!) may have coined the phrase 'Oldies' but we are generally still quite youthful in our activities. It is the turn of our Dutch friends to host our next get-together. This will take place between 28 June and 5 July 2014 and it will be a cruise through the 'green heartland of Holland' on a hotel boat. This will take us through a varied landscape of rivers, canals and countryside and also provide possibilities for visits to historical and architecturally interesting sites,

and also for cycle excursions for the more energetic. This is surely a very special enduring friendship and a still-widening one. Why not join us in 2014 and rekindle old friendships? For fuller information and to register your interest please contact the Dutch Organising Committee: a.heering@kplanet.nl; or snail-mail Annetien Heering, Groenewoud 36, 4381 HE Vlissingen, The Netherlands; or telephone Hans de Lathouder +31 70 8872900.

And then there's BIRF

British former IRFers, keen to see each other more frequently than the International Reunions, met up at The Nightingale Centre last summer to spend some relaxing time together. It was such a success that we are doing it all again - this year it will be from 16-20 September – and 'Oldies' (old and new) and their partners are very welcome. Contact Stella Burney at The Nightingale Centre – info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk Tel 01298 871218 – mention the BIRF Gathering.

Valerie Walker is a 'BIRFer'.



British IRF 'Oldies' at The Nightingale Centre, August 2012

Not only beauty is in the beholder's eye

By Danny Crosby

They say that, 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder', that beauty is subjective. But surely this applies to everything that we see and behold. I recently came across the following in Bill Darlison's wonderful book of short stories *Concentration and Compassion*.

The Dog in a Hall of Mirrors

There once was a dog who wandered into a room filled with mirrors. The dog looked around, seeing what appeared to be lots of other dogs, growled and showed his teeth. When he saw the other dogs do the same, he got frightened and cowered. When he noticed the other dogs cowering, he once again growled and started barking. A similar reaction from the others made him cower and become very frightened once again. This continued over and over again until the dog finally fell over, dead from emotional and physical exhaustion.

I wonder what would have happened if the dog had, just once, wagged its tale?

It seems that it is not only beauty that is in the eye of the beholder. So much of life is about how we see things and how we look at things; so much of life is about perspective. If only the dog in the story had just wagged his tail instead of snarling and cowering, he would not have frightened himself to death. Instead he could have lived a happy and carefree life.

So it's not just about our perspective, it's about 'how' we look at things. The eyes reveal so much. So often we get back what we give off in life.

At a Lent breakfast talk I attended in Urmston, we were asked what characteristics of Jesus had the greatest impact on us. I said it was his eyes or at least the way he looked at those he came into contact with. The accounts say that when he looked at the crowds of people or individuals, no matter who they were, he 'looked on them with compassion'.

How we look at others is so important. We can look on people with compassion, or we can give them a 'hard look'. Think about it when someone gives us a 'hard look', what do we do? Well often we turn away in fear, or respond in anger or aggression. What if someone looks at us with compassion, how do we respond to this? Well usually we look back with compassion. Well we do unless we have fallen so far down into that pit of nihilistic despair that we respond to love with utter hatred. I'm sure most folk have been there at some point. I know that I have.

How we act towards others really matters. But it's not just about doing what is right; it's also about the spirit in which each task is conducted. We can appear to be encouraging and loving and doing the right thing, but our eyes may well say otherwise. Think about a smile. We think we smile with our mouths. But we do not. We smile with our eyes. When I smile, my eyes almost slant shut. Whatever we do and however we do something our eyes will reveal the truth of our hearts and people will intuitively pick up on this. They will see it in our eyes.

The other week I was walking down the street and passed several friends, one after another walking on the other side of the road. As they past I waved and offered a greeting to them. They responded by waving and saying hello back. I walked away smiling and chuckling to myself. Then a thought came to me. I wish I had a hat. I wish I had a hat because I could tip my hat to them instead of just waving. I could greet them in what



I wonder what would have happened if the dog had, just once, wagged its tale? Photo by Andrzej Pobiedziński

seems to me to be a more reverential way. By tipping my hat I could show reverence to their sacred uniqueness, in much the same way that a Hindu does when they bow, with their hands held together. Wouldn't it be marvellous if we could find ways to revere one another as we passed each other in the street?

Then over the last few weeks I have begun to think about this again. We do not need hats to tip, we have our eyes and our eyes reveal our persona, they truly are the windows to our souls. We can show how we feel about one another and life simply by how we look at the world. We can see the world through hard eyes, by giving one another a hard look or we can look on the world with love and compassion. When we walk into the hall of mirrors that is life we can see ourselves reflected back in the eyes of one another and either cower or snarl or we can wag our tails. The choice is ours. Which one do you choose today?

How we see the world matters and how we respond perhaps even more so. Life truly is in the 'eye of the beholder'. How we see one another is vital. Try not to look so hard today and, you never know, those eyes looking back at you might just be stretched by a smile.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.

**'We smile
with our
eyes.
When I
smile,
my eyes
almost
slant shut.'**



Letters to the Editor

Items for worship are closer to Catholic tradition

To the Editor:

I often get confused but found myself more so than usual reading Adrian Worsfold's article on worship (*Inquirer* 16 March). I have no problem with his belief that, 'the old liberal Christian tradition is pretty well exhausted now', even if I disagree with it. What confused me was the list at the end of items for worship, its process and content.

Being married to a Roman Catholic it seemed obvious to me that all of the items mentioned are covered within the celebration of the Mass – be it RC or Anglican. I thought, as Unitarians, we were striving for something more than this in our worship? Maybe I am missing something.

Dr Brian Hick

Hastings Meeting

Sometimes all that's needed is a conversation

To the Editor:

I don't think I hate meetings as much as Ant Howe does (*Inquirer*, 16 March).

In fact, there are some meetings I actually enjoy – usually the ones with clear outcomes in view. Maybe this is because I am essentially an activist who likes to get things done.

Having been involved in committees at church and work for years, I confess it took me decades to understand how meetings can best be used. They are a tool, not an end in themselves. Everyone's time is valuable, and some of us have buses or trains to catch home after the meetings. Or we want time to enjoy a pint at the local after the meeting and just have a chat!

Ant is absolutely right though – we need dreamers, prophets, teachers and rituals. And we need to find a way for the people who have those gifts to interact with those who are running the organisation.

Here at Cambridge, we are trying to bridge that gap in a small way. Our regular committee meetings (six a year) had got so cluttered with 'business' there was no time to talk about the 'spiritual' side of our church's life, no time for exploring directions for

the future, or developing our worship and community life. These things kept getting squeezed out.

So we've started having a 'conversation' evening in between the business meetings. There is no formal agenda, simply the space and time for each of us to raise ideas and together try to develop them.

It's early days yet, but I am hopeful.

Andrew Bethune

Vice-Chairman

Cambridge Unitarians

A fan of this 'Funny Old World'

To the Editor:

I always enjoy John Midgley's 'Funny Old World' and was pleased to find myself featured so prominently in it (*Inquirer*, 2 February). Referring to the recent piece about me in *The Guardian*, John notes that in it 'Unitarianism' was spelt with a small 'u'. I share his irritation.

The paper's great editor CP Scott, who (like my great-grandfather) was a regular worshipper at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, would not have overlooked such an error.

John quotes the passage at the end of the interview where I refer to my membership of a 'spiritual movement based in Nigeria'. I did not name the movement but I am glad that he has seen fit to do so. I should point out that its alternative name is 'Christ's Universal Spiritual School of Practical Christianity' – but that is rather a mouthful, and so it is generally known as 'Brotherhood of the Cross and Star' (BCS) – which, since so many of its most active members are women, is perhaps a little misleading.

Those wishing to know how and why I joined Brotherhood can always put my name into Google. There, among all the stuff about my better-known namesake (no relation) at the Goring Hotel, they will find the apologia that I wrote when I resigned (for the second time) from the Unitarian ministry.

I concluded it with a quotation from James Drummond, once assistant minister at Cross Street and the last of the great Unitarian divines. He died in 1918, the year in which Olumba Olumba Obu, founder of BCS, was

born, and his words have a prophetic ring.

'I seem to behold a kingdom of God embracing the wide world, and the great ideals of the blessed Christ reigning triumphant in the hearts of men, drawing together the nations of the world into one vast brotherhood bound to one another by the golden chain of a common adoration and a mutual love.'

Is it because people have been unable to behold this 'kingdom' that Unitarianism has experienced the decline that David Usher (in the same issue of *The Inquirer*) describes so vividly? As the proverb says, 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.'

Jeremy Goring

St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex

Send-a-child-to-Hucklow needs trustees

To the Editor:

This year's Send-a-Child-to-Hucklow holidays for disadvantaged children began in March, with children coming from Liverpool. They will be followed by a further 11 groups of children, making a total of around 200 disadvantaged children being provided with a holiday in Derbyshire during 2013.

Following last year's hugely successful celebrations of 50 years of this Unitarian charity's work, the 14 Trustees are now looking forward to the next 50 years!

With this in mind we invite readers of *The Inquirer* to consider if they have the interest and time to be a Trustee of Send-A-Child-To-Hucklow. An excellent starting place would be the charity's Website – www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk – where

a wealth of information is available, and you can ring either Derek Smith (01623 651867) or Ernest Baker (0114 266 1070) for a chat about what's involved in being a Trustee.

I have been actively involved in this nationwide Unitarian charity for 50 years, and have found the work rewarding and satisfying.

The Rev Derek Smith
Mansfield

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Church photographs are for illustration purposes



Bury celebrated Sunday school

Bury Unitarian Church celebrated the first service of 2013, as well as the occasion of the Junior Church Prize-giving. The children had an eventful weekend, in any case, as they had visited Oldham Coliseum, the day before, to see the pantomime, *Cinderella*; during the service, they talked to our minister, the Rev Beryl Allerton, about the pantomime, what had happened, and which of the characters they had liked best. We have six children in our Junior Church and four more attend occasionally, and we are expecting two more regulars. Our oldest member, Mrs Alice Whewell, was to celebrate her 99th Birthday on 6 January – and it was exactly 40 years since our former Minister, the Rev John Allerton had conducted his first service at Bury Unitarian Church. So we asked them to present the prizes jointly. John read out the children's names, and Alice handed over the books they had chosen. In her turn, Alice received a card and flowers, along with the best wishes of the congregation; in addition, the Junior Church teachers, June Clarke and Olive Westhead, received bouquets to thank them for their excellent work. The atmosphere of the service was full of joy; our prize-giving ceremony fitted well with the theme of the service, too, as we reviewed the past year in our church-life and prepared for the challenges of the year ahead. Photo of Alice, surrounded by the children, teachers and the Rev John Allerton is by Howard Maden

– Anne Mills



The unveiling at Crofton, West Yorkshire, in March of a blue plaque commemorating schoolmistress Richmal Mangnall (1769–1820) was something of a Unitarian event. Richmal Mangnall is renowned as the author of *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions for the Use of Young People*, originally published in 1798 and had numerous editions. One of 11 children, she was adopted by her uncle, John Kay, a Manchester solicitor who was a trustee of Cross Street Chapel. Kay sent his niece to Crofton Hall Academy where she later became a teacher and, in 1808, the proprietor. Cynthia Dickinson, who presided at the unveiling, is associated with Westgate Chapel, Wakefield. John Goodchild, president of the congregation at Westgate Chapel, provided an exhibition of documentary material about Miss Magnall, including a copy of her *Questions*, and Kate Taylor, another member of Westgate Chapel, was also at the unveiling. The plaque was provided by Wakefield Civic Society. Photograph by Gerry Dickinson

Youth Panel has been busy

The Youth Programme undertakes many activities, but of course its main focus is running youth events, mostly weekends at Great Hucklow. During 2011/12 we ran nine residentials, with 154 attendees. But we want more! If you have youth from age 7-up who might be interested to hear about what we do, get in touch (suetalbot@virginmedia.com).

We all hope you've enjoyed the second Youth Sunday in January. We're already planning next year's big day, and have some lovely ideas we hope you'll all use in a special service where we look to our future. From what we see at our events – it couldn't be going to better hands!

Another key focus for the Youth programme 2012 was training. In addition to the constant rolling programme of recruiting/training/coaching new youth leaders, we also held our second Youth Leadership Conference. This fantastic



Claire Maddocks ably first aided by Sue Talbot, practising her eye-wound dressing skills, taking it all terribly seriously, naturally.

opportunity brings together experienced and future youth leaders to build valuable networks and share skills and experience. During the busy weekend schedule we attended sessions on safety in social networking, first aid, safeguarding, and much, much more. The feedback was incredibly positive from all involved, and we very much hope to continue this valuable initiative in future years. One of the key learning outcomes from the conference was the need for some formal training. So in July we organised a full safeguarding course for current leaders, and have organised access to online training for new recruits, which has supplemented the publication of our revised safeguarding policy nicely. In September several of us also completed a certificate in emergency first aid training (see photo), which now means at least one leader from each residential event is covered.

And finally, the Youth Panel would like to thank all our volunteer youth leaders, who put in a huge number of man hours to plan and run all our events – thank you!

– Sue Talbot, Youth Panel chair